



Water Rights

Water and water rights are the lifeblood of any ranching operation. They ensure sufficient crop yields, support healthy stock, and sustain productive ranching practices. Here at Grant-Kohrs Ranch we realize this, which is why since the park's conception in 1970 we have been taking every possible step to ensure the protection and preservation of the water rights which help this ranch flourish.

Currently the park has made claim to 25 separate and unique water rights. They consist of five wells, four springs, and sixteen river and or ditch rights. Their uses include irrigation, domestic uses, stock watering, and commercial applications with guaranteed flows of anywhere from 4.5 gallons per minute on the smallest well to 2926 gallons per minute on the largest ditch. In addition to a long list of water rights, the park has the benefit of owning some of the oldest rights in the state of Montana, some of which were originally claimed as far back as 1862. This is good news for the park as Montana operates under the precedent of 'first in time, first in right', meaning that because of the long ago establishment of the park's water rights, no matter what, Grant-Kohrs Ranch will be given first priority when it comes to receiving the amount of water which their written claim proscribes.



The Kohrs-Manning Ditch, which originates on the park and carries water to four ranches, pulls water from the Clark Fork River

However many of the rights that the park has historically owned have not yet been certified by the Montana State Court. This is due to water administration changes which were brought about by the Montana Water Use Act of 1973. This act, which was passed by the Montana Legislature, required that all water rights be finalized through a 3 part state wide adjudication process. Since 1983 the rights of the park have been sitting in the first stage of this three part series. The Montana water courts have been overloaded and understaffed for decades leading some to wonder if the third and final stage of certification will be something that current employees will see in their lifetimes.

In addition to the issues that remain in the courts, the water rights at Grant-Kohrs Ranch face challenges with regards to the Superfund clean up on its largest source of water, the Clark Fork River. The difficulty lies in the fact that some users of water in the Upper Clark Fork River Basin, are trading or even selling their water rights to the state in hopes of benefiting in-stream flows for a healthier fishery in the river. For a lot of water right owners whose current use of water has changed significantly from what they were historically, this is a viable if not optimal solution. In the end both they and the river come out ahead. This option may at one time present itself to Grant-Kohrs, at which time the park will need to make a decision. But for the time being the Park is not anticipating releasing any of its rights, as all are needed for the current ranching land use.

So for now, the park sits and waits, secure in the knowledge that all has been done to protect this prosperous ranch today and to preserve it for tomorrow.